

#BanTheADL: Taking the Public Square Back from the Censors, by Keith Woods - The Unz Review

Sep. 8th, 2023

 Send to Kindle

Last week, I urged everybody to join me in a call to #BanTheADL. The response has been greater than I expected, to put it mildly. Everybody—and I do mean everybody—shared the hashtag.

The timing of this was not incidental. Days prior, Jonathan Greenblatt of the ADL announced a productive conversation with new X/Twitter CEO Linda Yaccarino. After a somewhat hit-and-miss start to Elon's reign censorship-wise, it appeared things were going back in the direction the ADL desired. X users were exasperated. Many big accounts began to post information exposing the nefarious workings of the ADL which caught Musk's attention, including their defence of Julius Malema's singing of the "Kill the Boer" anthem in South Africa.

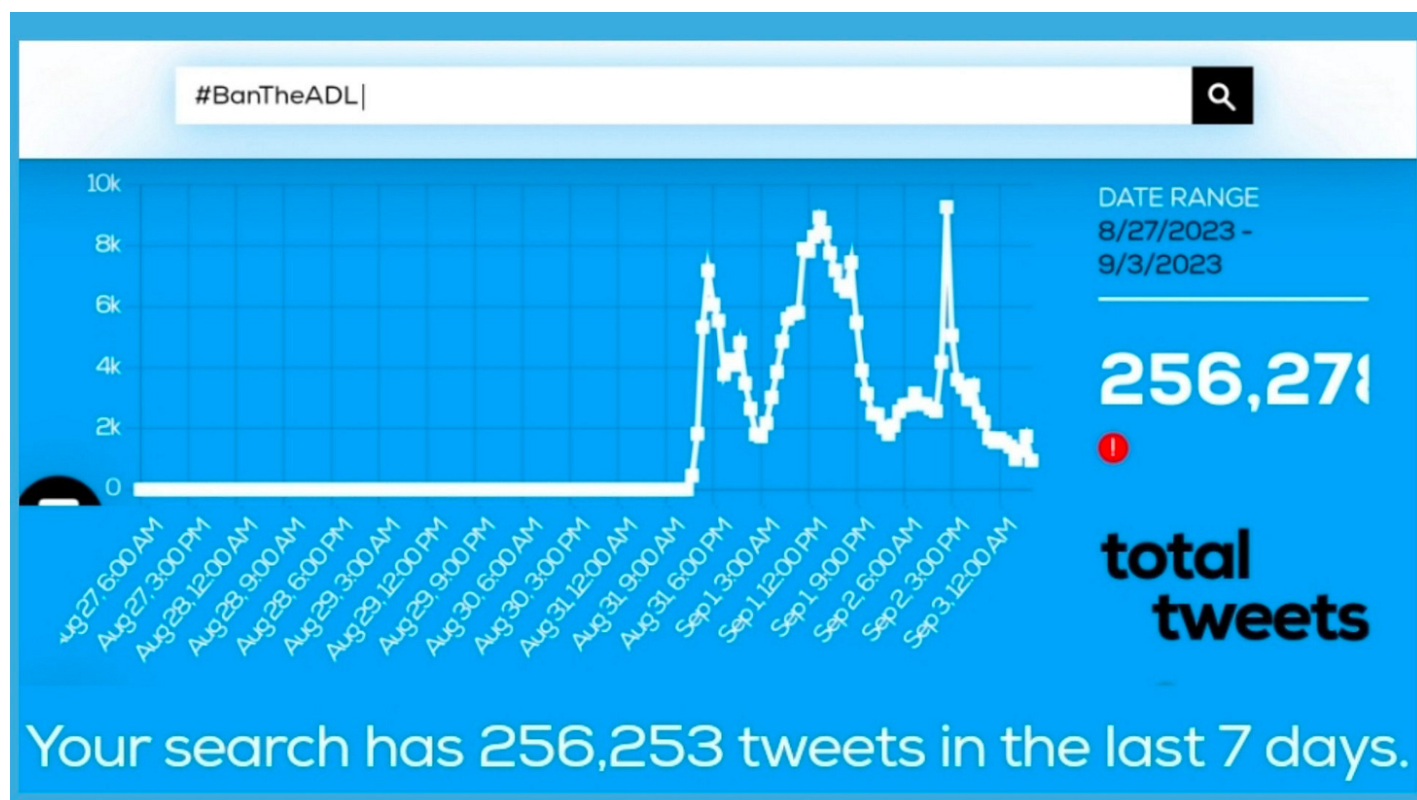
I am firmly of the belief that most social media users want a free speech environment, as evidenced by Musk's own poll on a total amnesty of banned accounts winning a popular vote. The problem is that a multitude of civil rights groups and other NGO's exist to drive a censorship agenda. There has never appeared to be a clear way to fight back against this.

Mark Zuckerberg tried to retain some principles on free speech, until an ADL led boycott in the summer of 2020 took 8% off Facebook's stock price and forced him to give in to Jonathan Greenblatt's demands. Donald Trump could have passed legislation to protect against deplatforming from the modern public

square, but by the end of his presidency the ADL successfully petitioned to have Trump banned from all major social media platforms with its participation in another boycott.

And then they came for Twitter. As soon as Elon Musk announced his purchase of the platform, the ADL announced another advertiser boycott in November 2022 as part of their “Stop Hate for Profit” coalition of civil rights groups, due to their concern over the apparent imminent threat to Jews created by Elon promising to “free the bird.”

One fascinating discovery to come out of the past week is Elon’s revelation that this boycott cost Twitter 60% of its advertiser revenue. With Twitter’s business model there isn’t really a way to achieve profitability with a loss that severe, and with Greenblatt again in talks with X management about cleaning up the platform of “hate”, it appeared Elon had finally caved to Greenblatt’s threats. That was, until, the enormous outpouring of anger at the ADL and its agenda, generating over 250 thousand tweets in 4 days under the #BanTheADL tag.



The case was rather simple, the ADL used its official Twitter account to promote a boycott against the company, threatening its financial viability. This was not a free speech issue, but a simple breach of Terms of Service, and it was about time the main culprits of censorship got a taste of their own medicine. As #BanTheADL grew though, it became a more general expression of people's outrage at the organisation and what it had done to the internet, as well as its sordid history.

Predictably, when the ADL finally released a statement, they blamed white supremacists, conspiracy theorists and trolls, apparently including early adopters like Indian Bronson, Dinesh D'Souza and Jewish activist Laura Loomer. Greenblatt would have you believe that this outpouring of outrage at the Anti-Defamation League is an outburst of antisemitism, the world's first digital pogrom. Of course, everything is an outburst of antisemitism when you're Jonathan Greenblatt.



But #BanTheADL isn't really about "the Jews." It's about who's allowed to participate in the public square of modern political discussion and debate. Set aside its dark origins, the debate over whether it actually speaks for the Jewish people, its track record of confirmed defamation, and even its track record of fabricating "hate" when it can't find enough to frame.

Social media companies are, for better or worse, the new public square where elections, policies, and popular movements sink or swim. Even if you grant that Trump's election wasn't directly rigged, there's no argument that the ADL leveraged its chokehold on advertising dollars to keep conservative influencers throttled by algorithms, shadow banned, and very often deplatformed. Given how close the presidential election was and how severe the censorship had become, it's clear to me that the ADL's illegal interference decided America's 2020 general election and severely tilted the 2022 mid-term election.

Even a little bit of censorship goes a long way, as the deplatforming of one voice has a *"pour encourager les autres"* muffling effect on the rest of the voices. The conservative influencers who weren't outright deplatformed had to resort to carefully crafting each post to be less conservative for fear of the ADL.

Elon's purchase of Twitter, which he promptly rebranded as *X* with ambitions to a more general platform and protocol for free speech, was alarming for the ADL. It was so alarming, in fact, that the ADL didn't even wait for him to take control of the company before instigating a crippling advertiser boycott to bankrupt the business.

This was inevitable

As much as I would like to take credit for the #BanTheADL campaign, this showdown was inevitable. Elon Musk's plan is to deliver a free and fair platform for not only political speech but entertainment, culture, and groupware-style communication and planning. His vision is fundamentally incompatible with ADL's mission to define, direct, and dictate the nature, tone, and boundaries of the political conversation in a specific direction.



But don't take my word for it. [Borat](#) explains [why](#) the unelected and unaccountable ADL should dictate who's allowed to speak rather than the owners of the corporations. Sacha Baron Cohen made his fame and fortune by peddling hateful and vulgar stereotypes of impoverished ethnic groups, implying that they're illiterate, incestuous, and sex-crazed rubes. But he would like you to know that *his* ethnic group will not tolerate equal treatment.

When Sacha Baron Cohen launched his scathing attack on silicon valley at an ADL conference in 2019, he was actually going after Facebook primarily, which the ADL still routinely attacks for not meeting its impossible standards for controlling public discourse. It's not that long ago that Greenblatt himself claimed to be a near free speech absolutist as it concerned social media, insisting his only concern as head of the ADL was direct threats of violence. Looking back at that interview now, it's hard to believe how taken for granted free speech on the internet was until at recently as 2016, and how much organisations like the ADL have normalised the idea of deplatforming anyone they find problematic.

Predictably, the ADL is now defaming me as (you guessed it) a “raging antisemite”. They dredged up an ancient tweet where I joked that Ben Shapiro had made me a “raging antisemite” to mock liberal claims that Ben (an Orthodox Jew) is promoting fascism. The joke was obvious in context, but the ADL isn't big on either jokes or context.

Now, Jonathan Greenblatt's hitting the media circuit to insist that Elon's resistance to the ADL's hostile takeover through tortious interference with its advertising budget is fueled by antisemitism. This would be comical if the ADL wasn't well-funded and well-connected enough to suck all of the comedy out of the room (and deplatform your favourite comedians).

Greenblatt began to sound like his old self on his damage control tour, insisting the ADL is not an enemy of free speech, and his only job as its leader of a “small non-profit” is to protect Jews from violence. Unfortunately, none of the interviewers asked him what promoting LGBT to children has to do with protecting Jews, or how his demand that President Trump's social media bans be permanent is not in conflict with his apparent love of free speech and opposition to cancel culture.



It was demonstrated what a liability Greenblatt's arrogance has become when he accused his Jewish interviewer of antisemitism for merely asking if the ADL had solicited donations from Twitter (something Musk later confirmed they had).

The accusation of antisemitism against Elon Musk is as farcical as his random accusation against the interviewer in that clip. Elon's not even a conservative or republican. He's a true believer in free speech and an open marketplace of opinions and ideas.

Musk is a naturalized immigrant to America who has bought in, without reservation, to the American promises of free enterprise and free speech. And literally nobody's making more money and speaking more freely than Elon. If anything, it's the ADL's attempts to *shut it down* in the name of the Jews that's fuelling antisemitism.

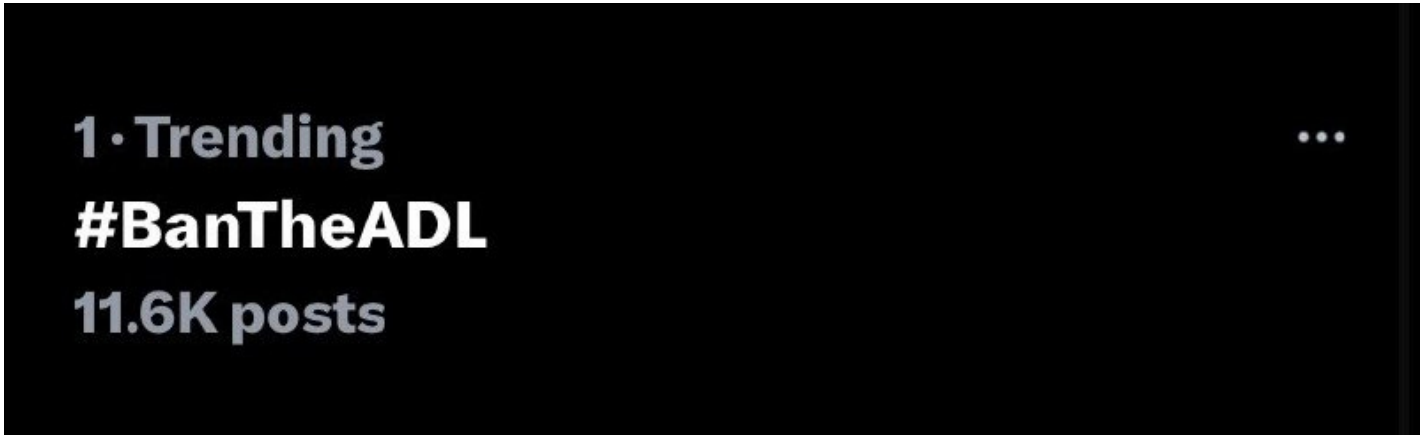
Of course, you guessed it, suggesting that the ADL is contributing to antisemitic sentiment by silencing conservatives in the name of the Jews and accusing

everybody of antisemitism is also antisemitic. Asking yourself if they might be obsessively fixated on antisemitism? Antisemitic.

For me, the highlight of this was jumping on a space discussing #BanTheADL campaign and exposing an operative for an Israeli intelligence firm and associate of Jonathan Greenblatt who was pretending to be an impartial observer of the situation.

Vivian panicked and fled the space, then deleted her social media entirely in response to my simple and fair question. Immediately afterward, her wikipedia was amended in an attempt to remove any mention of her intelligence work. Despite claiming to be unfamiliar with the ADL, Jonathan Greenblatt had actually come to Vivian's defence when questions were raised about her private meetings with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in her role as Canada's ambassador to Israel.

In the days following the launch of the campaign, more and more Jewish conservatives have joined the campaign against the ADL, including Ben Shapiro and Stephen Miller. We need every voice we can to speak up against the ADL's monopoly control over political discourse and election outcomes in America and beyond. If conservative Jews decide the ADL is doing them more harm than good and denounce it, it loses its major source of credibility which is claiming to represent the Jewish community.



A screenshot of a social media trending topic. The background is black. The text is white and grey. It shows '1 · Trending' in grey, '#BanTheADL' in large white font, and '11.6K posts' in white. There are three white dots to the right of '1 · Trending'.

1 · Trending
#BanTheADL
11.6K posts

After trending number one worldwide for hours, Elon Musk himself acknowledged the campaign, when in response to me, he wrote that “ADL has tried very hard to strangle X/Twitter.” With the #BanTheADL campaign showing no sign of slowing down, Musk asked X if he should put it to a poll. Musk ultimately decided the ADL would not be banned because it had not made any unlawful speech, but did announce he would be suing the Anti-Defamation League for defamation.

We also got a promise of an “ADL files” drop which will reveal the kind of pressure the ADL placed on Twitter, and Elon has already revealed they pressed for the banning of the popular “Libs of TikTok” account. In an exchange with myself, Elon also signalled his intention to make lifetime bans from Twitter increasingly rare, so there is much from the last week to be hopeful about.



Of course, Elon is notoriously unpredictable, and whether this fight will spill over from social media into a real courtroom where real legal remedies are

possible is anybody's guess. After his first round of public interviews, Greenblatt changed his tone and is now claiming that neither Musk nor Twitter are "antisemitic," perhaps because he recognizes how exposed and unpopular he is.

What this all means

The rollout of free social media was the most revolutionary development in information dissemination since the printing press. When the regime realised just how revolutionary it was, they got to work spending years fighting for control through lobbying and financial manipulation. While much of this pressure was informal, through networks and backchannels, the ADL is the institutional, public face of this political racketeering network. In 5 years, they had all but destroyed the revolutionary potential afforded by these platforms.

The situation around censorship in 2021 looked hopelessly bleak. After the deplatforming of Donald Trump, a rubicon had been crossed. Looking back, there was probably no possible timeline where free speech could be restored to the digital public square outside of the richest man in the world buying Twitter and attempting to destroy the ADL on a wave of popular support. It's important to remember what a remarkably unlikely and fortunate series of events that was.



If the internet was the most revolutionary development of our age, the fight to protect it from near total control by insidious actors like the ADL may turn out to be one of the most important fights of the century. I have no idea how this will play out, it's still possible nothing will come of it, though Elon now seems committed to taking on this fight.

Regardless of what Musk delivers from here, millions have been shown the man behind the curtain, and they're not happy. People who believe in a free public square have actually been united and motivated to launch a pushback against these unelected tyrants like Greenblatt, a private citizen who has appointed himself the sole arbiter of what may and may not be discussed in the public square.

As far as I can tell, this is the first time there has been meaningful pushback against the censors. Instead of being on the defensive, looking to disavow the person immediately to their right, conservatives and believers in free speech of all stripes are now on the offensive, working to expose the ADL to their millions of followers.

If we lose this fight to wrestle our ability to speak from the ADL, we'll lose every other fight. The #BanTheADL campaign is diverse, bipartisan, and inclusive of everybody who believes in the power of open discussion and debate. Whether it all ends with the ADL getting banned for platform manipulation, getting bankrupted for tortious interference in several companies, catching another defamation lawsuit, or backing down in response to the popular outcry, anything is better than a future where the ADL dictates what you can and can't say. Godspeed Elon.